

OPSB receives a written complaint regarding grade changes to Algebra Class (Dr. Love)

On February 28, 2019, The OPSB received written notification alleging an Improper Grade Change Scheme, Mishandling of the Investigation, Grievance Mishandling, and Employee Retaliation.

On March 7, 2019 Gayla Mair, Director of School Performance, and Dr. Kelli Peterson, Senior Equity and Accountability Officer conducted a meeting with Dr. Runnell King following up on a letter that he sent to OPSB Administration via email alleging grade changes at John F. Kennedy High School at Lake Area had occurred. During this meeting Dr. King provided documentation to support his claim that included the following documents:

- 1) A print-out of PowerSchool modified grades
- 2) Notes from PowerSchool regarding change inquiry
- 3) Quarter 2 Historical Grades for the class in question
- 4) Quarter 2 Report Card Print-Outs for the class in question
- 5) Email exchange regarding PowerSchool employee access
- 6) PowerSchool account management print-out
- 7) PowerSchool Login Records for user 3875
- 8) Email Re: Request for Investigation Update
- 9) Email Re: HR request of report cards
- 10) PowerSchool screenshots re: grade changes
- 11) Email re: grade changes due to weighting issues
- 12) Email re: process for PowerSchool Schedule Request Tracker
- 13) Email re: schedule changes in PowerSchool
- 14) Email re: form for grade changes
- 15) Email re: ACT Labels
- 16) Statement after receiving suspension letter from NBSF
- 17) NBSF Summary of Employee Conference Form Re: Grievance

On March 12, 2019, Ulyses Collins, Senior Safety and External Affairs Officer and Dr. Kelli Peterson, Senior Equity and Accountability Officer, met with New Beginnings School Foundation to review their Investigation Status Report regarding Dr. Love's gradebook. During this meeting they provided documentation in the form of PowerSchool gradebook weighting scale screenshots to support their claim that the grade changes that were made were due to the weighting scale within PowerSchool being incorrect. Additionally, they provided the teacher in question's (Dr. Love) paper gradebook which detailed the individual student grades for the class in question. Dr. Love's gradebook corresponded with the adjusted/modified grades; thus, it was concluded that the incorrect grades that were printed on the Q2 report cards were in fact due to a grade weight issue within PowerSchool. This was the conclusion of the review of documents that were submitted to OPSB. From this date forward, communications with NBSF were verbal and our final decision is pending receipt of official documentation of all events going forward. The OPSB investigation remains open until a final determination is made.

On March 15, 2019, Dr. King forwarded an email (Fw: Investigation Packet) from Dr. Love to Dr. Peterson, which stated, "For the record, I was never told that there was an investigation. I certainly wanted to know the urgency, all of a sudden about a roll book."

On March 21, 2019, the OPSB received a media request from The Lens, inquiring about “grade changes at Kennedy.” After consulting with legal and External Affairs, Dr. Peterson spoke with Michelle Blouin-Williams, CEO of New Beginnings to inform her that we had received contact from media regarding this incident and that we would be providing them with information from the March 13th Memo. Michelle-Blouin Williams stated that they had also received an inquiry regarding responses from media and would be reaching out to meet face to face with Marta of The Lens. Upon the conclusion of the call, Michelle forwarded the email that she sent to Marta of The Lens as well as the answers to the questions Marta posed and her responses.

On March 22, 2019, The Lens published the “F to D grade changes at Kennedy High School are suspicious, former administrator says.” Within this article, it stated, “In two mid March emails sent to Washington, Blouin-Williams and Gibson, Love disputed the changes. My roll book has problems and is not accurate. I found my copies of the Q1 grades that I signed and turned in October 15, 2018, she wrote. They are not the same as the digital downloaded grades from PowerSchool, which means, something is wrong.”

On March 25, 2019, Dr. Peterson spoke with Michelle-Blouin Williams and asked her about the quote within the article regarding Dr. Love’s statement that her grade book was inaccurate. She stated that she would have Mr. Washington to forward the emails between he and Dr. Love, which were sent that evening (Fwd: CORRECT GRADES-PARENTAL NOTIFICATION and Fwd: ROLL SUBMISSION-ERROR).

The email thread that was provided begins with communication on March 15, 2019, two days after the OPSB had concluded the initial fact finding. The March 15th email from Dr. Love to Mr. Williams states “The roll book has problems and is not accurate.” Additionally, she includes a specific student that she questions the final grade designation. In a series of the March 19th forwarded emails, Dr. Love reiterates the inaccurate grades, and also includes that students with “too many unexcused absences” should have an “F.”

On March 26, 2019, Ulyses Collins and Dr. Peterson called Michelle Blouin-Williams to ask questions regarding the email thread and allegations from Dr. Love’s emails and requested to be provided a statement regarding the additional allegations made by Dr. Love, as well as an update as to where NBSF is with their internal investigation. A response via email was provided on March 26th by Michelle Blouin-Williams.

As an internal follow-up the Pupil Progression Plan and Attendance Policy for NBSF was reviewed to determine if the policy required failure of a course due to attendance.

The Pupil Progression Plan states the following regarding promotion:

High School: Students must attain at least a D in each promotional subject-, ELA, Math-as final report cards, reflecting 70% mastery of Louisiana State Standards; and attain at least a D in either Science or Social Studies, reflecting a minimum 70% master of Louisiana State Standards; and have no more than ten days of unexcused absences.

The NBSF Attendance Policy posted on the website states the following:

Students in danger of failing due to excessive absences may be allowed to make up missed time in class sessions held outside the regular class time. The make-up sessions must be completed before the end of the current semester and all other policies must be met.

In the March 19th email from Dr. Love to Mr. Washington, Dr. Love attaches and highlights various lines within the New Beginnings Attendance Policy, however, it is to be noted that the version that is attached is from 2013.

On March 27, 2019, Dr. Peterson called Dr. Love on both her home and cell phone number and left voicemail messages, as well as sending an email to request a meeting regarding the grade change allegations.

On March 28, 2019, Ulyses Collins and Dr. Peterson called Dr. King to ask additional questions regarding PowerSchool password access and use. During this phone call, Dr. King stated that the last time that he was logged into PowerSchool was February 26th and that he had only one personal log-in to PowerSchool. However, he stated that Michelle-Blouin Williams asked him to make three additional log-ins for state reporting purposes for Shawanda, and two other individuals that he trained on completing this report. He stated that Roxanne created three generic accounts for this purpose, King 1, King 2, and King 3. Dr. King stated that he did not manage these accounts or their use.

Dr. King also stated that when Dr. Love left NBSF in January the only information that she recorded in her roll book was attendance, and not grades. However, the school reached out to her asking her to complete her gradebook with the grades, at which time Dr. Love downloaded this information from PowerSchool and entered it into the gradebook as printed. However, after time passed she realized that the grades she entered into the gradebook downloaded directly from PowerSchool were inaccurate, which prompted her emails to the school about this issue. Dr. King forwarded the signed grade verification forms from Dr. Love for Q1.

NBSF Retains Law Firm for Investigation

On April 1, 2019, The OPSB observed the NBSF Board approve an independent third-party legal firm to investigate- Adams and Reese Law Firm.

On April 2, 2019, The OPSB wrote to notify NBSF that in subsequent to being apprised of the grade change allegations, OPSB was also made aware of additional allegations surrounding possible falsification of public records. Specifically, it has been alleged that NBSF board minutes may have been altered and contracts may not have been properly approved. Additionally, it was requested for NBSF to provide the following information:

- a. Confirmation that an independent third party has been retained to investigate the aforementioned allegations;

- b. Details of any investigation into the aforementioned allegations, including party(ies) conducting the investigation, nature of investigation, documents reviewed, transcripts of interviews conducted, and any conclusions reached;
- c. Any steps being taken to ensure that the integrity of the grading process is intact and to prevent any unlawful grade manipulation in the future;
- d. Any steps taken to ensure against unlawful tampering with official documents;
- e. Any other reports or documents relevant to the all aforementioned allegations; and
- f. Any reports or documents relevant to any additional allegations or concerns that may arise as a result of investigations into the aforementioned allegations.

OPSB Meets with Adams and Reese

On April 10, 2019, Dr. Peterson met with Jaimie Collins of Adams & Reese Law Firm. Per Jaimie's request, Dr. Peterson brought copies of the documents that OPSB collected during the OPSB investigation. At that time, it was disclosed that the Adams & Reese investigation into Dr. Love's grade changes had come to the same conclusion as the March 12th OPSB investigation.

On April 24, 2019, The OPSB provided a written follow-up to the April 2, 2019 written notification. Within that communication, OPSB wrote to request confirmation of Adams & Reese conducting the investigation, OPSB receiving results of the investigation, and inquire if the investigation would include review of any possible violation(s) of whistleblower laws (or evidence that Dr. King's dismissal was in retaliation for his report of alleged wrongdoing by NBSF) as it relates to Dr. King's dismissal by NBSF.

On April 30, 2019, New Beginnings School Foundation held a Charter Board Meeting at which The OPSB staff was in attendance.

On May 1, 2019, The OPSB received written response from NBSF responding to the April 24, 2019 written notification from the OPSB.

On May 3, 2019, The OPSB confirmed receipt of the May 1, 2019 response from NBSF. Additionally, within that communication, the following was outlined as a priority to resolve:

- a. Alleged grade irregularities: As we are approaching the end of the school year, it is important that OPSB gets an assurance as quickly as possible that students' grades have not been inappropriately altered in any way. Due to the seriousness of the claim that students' grades were changed, OPSB took the step to alert the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) who is awaiting the results of any investigation into grade changes to determine if there are any steps that they need to take. If this matter is resolved to the satisfaction of LDOE, negative action could be taken against NBSF by LDOE.

- b. Alleged change of NBSF board minutes: If NBSF board minutes were altered in any way, this could be viewed as a falsification of records which is illegal and carries with it potential civil and criminal penalties. It is OPSB's expectation that if NBSF discovers any illegal activity, such activity must be reported to the appropriate authorities, consistent with any applicable laws, as well as to OPSB for appropriate action.
- c. Alleged improper award of contracts: If it is determined that any contracts were awarded in contravention of the law or NBSF policies, it is OPSB's expectation that such determination be reported to the appropriate authorities and to OPSB for appropriate action.
- d. Investigative reports: OPSB has asked to be kept apprised of the investigation that NBSF has initiated. OPSB is continuing to monitor the outstanding allegations to determine any next steps that must be taken as your authorizer. In order to determine whether the allegations have been resolved to our satisfaction, OPSB must know the details of your investigation. This includes understanding what documentation and information was reviewed, what information was discovered and what remedies were undertaken to address the issues revealed by the allegations. Thus, OPSB is requesting that NBSF provide a written report at the conclusion of the investigation. This report should summarize the details of the investigation, including documents reviewed and persons interviewed. This report should also discuss any conclusions reached and summarize any corrective action taken or planned by NBSF as a result of the investigation.

On May 8, 2019, The OPSB sent a written request for a meeting to discuss the status of the ongoing investigation and OPSB's expectations in light of the investigation ending within the coming weeks.

On May 13, 2019, The OPSB and NBSF Board Chair convened to discuss the current status of the grade irregularities, alleged change of NBSF board minutes, alleged improper award of contracts, alleged employee retaliation, and upcoming CEO search.

NBSF reveals a new investigation must occur due to additional grade changes observed after Adams & Reese concluded the initial investigation into Dr. Love's gradebook

On May 24, 2019, It was revealed to OPSB by NBSF Leadership that upon the conclusion of the Adams & Reese investigation that additional grade changes had occurred by several JFK staff members. The OPSB sent written notification that it has come to our attention that there are possible grade changes involving the current 2018-2019 graduating class of John F. Kennedy at Lake Area and that OPSB's scope has now expanded to include a review of these additional allegations and any pertinent facts surrounding them.

On May 28, 2019, The OPSB sent written notification to the LDOE (Kunjan Narechania and Joan Hunt) to share that while OPSB was told the investigation was ending, it was discovered that an additional group of grades were altered for the current graduating seniors at JFK, and thus could have serious impact on the receipt of diplomas.

On May 28, 2019, New Beginnings School Foundation held a Charter Board Meeting at which The OPSB staff was in attendance. Specifically, during this meeting during the Executive Session, it was stated on the agenda “Investigation Presentation from Adams and Reese.”

On May 29, 2019, The OPSB held a call with the LDOE to discuss the allegations and current situation at John F. Kennedy.

On May 31, 2019, The LDOE sent a letter to NBSF.

LDOE comes onsite at JFK

On June 6, 2019, The OPSB staff were present at John F. Kennedy to oversee the work between the LDOE and NBSF to begin to audit senior student files for the purpose of validating credits, and graduation requirements. OPSB staff have continued to be present at JFK from June 6th, until present day. Additionally, The LDOE has been on the premises at JFK conducting the verification of the senior student audits beginning on June 6. The presence of The LDOE has halted any further investigation from Adams and Reese until the conclusion and final verification of senior student files has been completed.

OPSB sends Notice of Non-Compliance, Level 2

On June 7, 2019, The OPSB sent written notification to NBSF Re: Notice of Non-Compliance, Level 2 due to the lack of compliance as outlined with its contractual obligations.

On June 8, 2019, New Beginnings School Foundation held a Charter Board Meeting at which The OPSB staff was in attendance, and Superintendent Lewis. Specifically, during this meeting during the Executive Session, the Notice of Non-Compliance was explained to the charter board members.

On June 20, 2019, The OPSB staff and NBSF Board Chair, Raphael Gang met to be updated on the current status of the senior student audit, plan forward for summer school, December graduates, and organizational changes.

On June 20, 2019, The OPSB staff met with NBSF CEO, Kevin George to discuss required documents needed by the OPSB as mentioned within the meeting with the Charter Board Chair, further understand organizational updates, and answer any additional questions. The documents requested were as follows:

1. NBSF Business Rules utilized by the LDOE for verification purposes
2. Louisiana Department of Education Verification Approval Email
3. Finalized student specific prescriptions for each senior
4. Written correspondence inclusive of any changes, remedies, and plan for the 19-20 school year, specifically:

1. Financial Adjustments/Savings/Expenses
2. Credit Recovery Program and Plan
3. Organizational Chart (network and school specific)
5. Louisiana Department of Education Report Re: John F. Kennedy

On June 21, 2019, The OPSB received the following requested documents from NBSF:

1. NBSF Business Rules utilized by the LDOE for verification purposes
2. Louisiana Department of Education Verification Approval Email
3. Finalized student specific prescriptions for each senior

On June 25, 2019, The OPSB sent a written update to NBSF Re: Notice of Non-Compliance, Level 2 inclusive of additional required action steps. Additionally, this was the first day for summer school at John F. Kennedy that is inclusive of the impacted senior students.

On June 27, 2019, The OPSB received email communication from NBSF Board Chair Raphael Gang confirming that the report investigating allegations against NBSF employees is not yet complete, and the tentative date for completion is July 11.

On July 2, 2019, The LDOE published their New Beginnings School Foundation Report, inclusive of their findings and corrective action plan.

On July 3, 2019 The OPSB sent a written update to NBSF Re: Notice of Non-Compliance, Level 2: Contractual Obligations, regarding outstanding submissions.

On July 8, 2019 The OPSB met with NBSF CEO to discuss preparations for the upcoming parent meetings, as well as further learn more about the progress of the summer school students and subsequent plans for the students who do not complete by the end of the summer session.

On July 15, 2019, NBSF Board Chair submitted a letter and supporting documentation in response to the July 3, 2019 correspondence. With the following information:

1. Steps being taken to ensure that the integrity of the grading process is intact and to prevent any unlawful grade manipulation in the future;
2. Steps being taken to ensure against unlawful tampering with official documents;
3. Confirmation that the investigative report will be provided to OPSB;
4. Confirmation that the 3rd party investigation will include a review of any possible violations of whistleblower laws as it relates to Dr. King's dismissal by NBSF;
5. A written plan of action that addressed actions to resolve any issues for students related to the alleged grade changes, along with the individual prescriptions for each senior.

6. Written correspondence inclusive of any changes, remedies, and plan for the 19-20 school year, specifically:
 - a. Credit Recovery Program and Plan
 - b. Organizational Chart (network and school specific)
7. A weekly summary report for July 1-July 10, inclusive of attendance reports, student level progress towards graduation, interventions offered to students not progressing, and communication to families on student level progress.

Additionally, NBSF provided status updates on the remaining items:

1. OPSB is requiring that NBSF submit revised policies and procedures that address the allegations and prevent such allegations from occurring in the future.
 - a. NBSF Response: “We are working to revise our policies and procedures to incorporate appropriate checks and balances in regard to grading, tampering with documents and credit recovery. Our Pupil Progression Plan and our Operations Manual are currently being extensively revised as requested by the Louisiana Department of Education and the Orleans Parish School Board. We confirm that NBSF will submit the revised policies and procedures as requested.”
2. Written correspondence inclusive of any changes, remedies, and plan for the 19-20 school year, specifically Financial Adjustments/Savings/Expenses.
 - a. NBSF Response: “We are presenting our budget to the Finance Committee on Tuesday, July 16th and to the Full Board on July 18th. We have made adjustments and plan to present to the Board a balanced budget. We will forward to you the draft budget on Friday, July 19th after it is presented to our Finance Committee and adjustments are made based on their comments.”

On July 16, 2019 NBSF submitted financial reports, outline of new SIS, credit recovery policy and organizational charts specifying individuals responsible for implementation.

On July 18, 2019, The New Beginnings School Foundation Charter Board voted to surrender their charters for both John F. Kennedy at Lake Area High School and Pierre A. Capdau Charter School effective at the end of the 2019-2020 school year.

On July 19, 2019, NBSF held a meeting with Capdau staff and families and JFK staff and families, with OPSB staff present to announce the surrender of the charters for both schools at the end of the school year.